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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001413

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SUBJECT: GENERAL ARRESTED IN ANOTHER ALLEGED COUP PLOT

REF: CARACAS 1373

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Classified By: Francisco Fernandez, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Mario Isea, president of the National Assembly special committee investigating the attempt to overthrow/assassinate President Hugo Chavez, announced the arrest of Air Force Inspector General Jose Felix Caraballo Gomez on September 26. The arrest is based on a tape recording between the General, banker Vinicio De Sola and unidentified parties. Isea implicated El Nacional newspaper owner Miguel Otero for hosting a meeting between the alleged conspirators. Isea also implied links between De Sola's brother and Otero's 2 December (2D) civil society movement. Otero denied the accusations, pointing out De Sola died almost a month ago. Critics have called the recording a "set up" because some of the conversations date back to 2005. The Venezuelan attorney general formally named Alberto Ravell, director of the opposition broadcaster Globovision as a coup conspirator on September 26. The increasingly convoluted accusations appear aimed at keeping the opposition off balance and to distract attention away from further revelations in the Antonini trial. End Summary.

#### BEYOND THE GRAVE

12. (SBU) Addressing the special committee investigating the alleged attempt to overthrow/assassinate Chavez, Deputy Mario Isea announced the arrest of general (two star equivalent) Jose Felix Caraballo Gomez, Inspector General of the Air Force. According to Isea a recording between General Caraballo, Vinicio De Sola, a businessman described by Isea as "a banker, professional conspirator and coup plotter," and an unidentified third party proved a conspiracy to recruit generals from all four service branches to testify before the Supreme Court against Chavez' new Armed Forces law. Isea expanded De Sola's role claiming that the tape proved the deceased banker was involved in plotting against Chavez as far back as April 2002. According to Isea, El Nacional editor Otero hosted meetings in his house attended by De Sola and "the whole world, even the clergy," in order to "plan or execute" the April 11, 2002 coup. Otero called the charges, "absolutely ridiculous," and denied any connection between De Sola and the civil society group 2D while pointing out that De Sola had been dead almost a month.

#### INSULT TO INJURY

13. (SBU) Three days after a tear gas attack against their television studio, Globovision director Alberto Ravell

received notice from the Venezuelan attorney general that he had been named as member of a conspiracy to assassinate President Chavez and overthrow his government. As Ravell tried to depart Venezuela on October 1 for the Inter-American Press Society meeting in Madrid, airport authorities pressured him to surrender his passport. He reportedly handed over a photocopy and successfully boarded his flight. (Note: Several critics of the BRV have handed over their passports over for photocopying at the airport only to have them confiscated. End Note.)

#### CRITICS

14. (SBU) Critics of the BRV were quick to rebut Isea's latest accusations. Henry Ramos Allup, secretary general of Accion Democratica, said Venezuela's intelligence organs "live to make up conspiracies." COPEI party president Ignacio Planas accused the government of attempting to distract Venezuelans from the Antonini suitcase trail and warned CANTV users (the state telephone company) that their conversations were being recorded and edited to "persecute the opposition." Radio commentator Martha Colomina chided that the AT-4 anti-tank weapon (Reftel) confiscated on September 25 was an empty launch tube that had hung on a businessman's wall after an Army officer gave it to him 14 years earlier. Opposition leaders claim that in a recent poll, 65% Venezuelans surveyed believe the coup and assassination plots are inventions of the government. Undaunted, Isea claimed on October 1 that Chavez was facing multiple conspiracies to either bomb Miraflores palace with an F-16, shoot down his plane, assault his motorcade with a rocket launcher, or be attacked by Colombian paramilitaries controlled by opposition Zulia state governor Manuel Rosales.

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15. (C) COMMENT: The BRV is likely to continue to make undocumented accusations against the opposition in coming weeks. It is noteworthy that General Caraballo is the first active duty to be arrested as a coup plotter and could be a warning to other officers. The BRV appears determined to divert attention from the suitcase trial, intimidate the opposition and galvanize its base prior to the November 23 state and local elections. End Comment.

CAULFIELD